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LAUSD will vote on budget that saves adult ed, but shortens school year

By Barbara Jones Staff Writer
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The Los Angeles Unified board is poised Thursday to approve a \$6.3 billion budget for 2012-13 that salvages some adult and early-education programs but shortens the school year, eliminates thousands of jobs and wipes out after-school care for at least 50,000 youngsters.

The financial plan released Monday is the result of gut-wrenching decisions spotlighted during months of school board meetings, with employees, parents and students pleading at the microphone and demonstrating outside for threatened programs to be spared.

In the end, the district had to whittle away \$169 million to meet the state requirement for a balanced budget.

That included trimming \$84 million from Adult Education and \$9million from school-readiness classes for young English-learners.

If the budget is approved Thursday, the Beyond the Bell Division will lose its after-school program, outdoor education camps, jazz band and youth orchestra. However, the high-profile Honor Marching Band and Academic Decathlon will continue.

Class sizes will remain at current levels, schools will still have librarians and nurses, early-childhood enrollment will stay level and elementary students will have access to arts and music programs. Thirteen continuation schools slated for closure will continue operating.

"We were able to avert catastrophe, but there's still real and present pain and loss," school board member Steve Zimmer said Monday. "Children and their families are still losing because of this budget crisis."

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Back in January, with the state deferring funding for California's public schools, Los Angeles Unified anticipated it would have to slash its budget by nearly \$557 million.

An infusion of cash and agreements by the district's unions to shorten the 2012-13 school year by up to 10 days helped narrow - but not eliminate - the deficit.

That meant the district had to proceed with the layoffs of thousands of teachers, administrators, classified employees and skilled tradesmen. A district spokeswoman said 11,000 pink slips sent out in March are still being rescinded, so the estimated number of job losses was unavailable.

Many of those jobs, however, will likely be cut from the Adult Education Division, which saw its proposed budget bought down to about \$36 million, compared with \$160 million during the current fiscal year.

The division is being "reshaped" to focus on English-language, credit-recovery and programs for adults with disabilities, said Andres Ameigeiras, the administrator of operations. Career-technical programs like cosmetology and auto shop and classes for older

adults - such as exercise and painting - will still be offered, but on a fee basis.

Ameigeiras said classes will be consolidated and some facilities closed, such as the Pacoima Skills Center. Ameigeiras estimated the division will be able to serve about 100,000 students - one-third of this year's enrollment - but insisted that officials will make every effort to serve the maximum number of students.

With just a few days left before the board must approve a budget - the fiscal year starts July 1 - member Bennett Kayser is trying to find the \$7 million to rescue Beyond the Bell's after-school program.

He and others worry about the dilemma facing working parents who can't pick up their children in midafternoon, and the temptation facing youngsters left home alone.

"Who are we as a community if we turn 50,000 kindergarten through eighth-grade children into latchkey kids overnight?" Kayser said. "Worse, there is no private capacity to take on 50,000 children, even if their parents had the money to pay for after-school care.

"Local governments and foundations must immediately come together to solve this after-school crisis."

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The division's Youth Services program operates from 3-6 p.m. weekdays, offering supervised activities for an estimated 42,000 students at the district's 654 elementary and middle schools. About 8,000 additional youngsters are enrolled in complementary after-school programs that will have to shut down without LAUSD personnel there to supervise.

There are also schools that receive state money to operate after-school programs on LAUSD campuses. With the loss of district funding, principals will have to decide who gets to stay and who has to go home.

"The district needs to go out and look for the money, they have to make cuts in other places," said parent advocate Scott Folsom. "This is not the time for the district to be rolling out new programs."

Heather Burgess, who has three children at Apperson Elementary in Sunland, hopes the district will find a way to restore the Youth Services funding or partner with another organization.

"If the board chooses not find money for Youth Services, a solution might be an outside program - Big Brothers Big Sisters or the Boys & Girls Club or the Y," she said.

The City Council is scheduled today to vote on a resolution opposing LAUSD's move to end the Youth Services program.

"After-school programs fill in gaps in education and provide enrichment," said Julie Wong, a spokeswoman for Councilman Eric Garcetti, a sponsor of the resolution. "The goal is to have something available to every family that wants and needs access."

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The Los Angeles Unified board will consider the 2012-13 budget when it meets at 1 p.m. Thursday at district headquarters, 333 S. Beaudry Ave.

The proposal includes \$169 million in cuts - significantly less than what had been proposed during an interim budget released in February. Here is a comparison of some of the proposed cuts.

Program-February-June

Adult Ed-\$177.8 million-\$84.2 million

After-school-\$6.9 million-\$6.9 million

Elem. Arts-\$18.6 million-\$0

Cafeteria-\$36.5 million-\$18.3 million

School Readiness Language Development Program-\$45.4 million-\$9.2 million

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